

Normandy Park Swim Club celebrates 50 years

By Jackie Graybill

07/31/2007

Thanks to visionaries both past and present, the Normandy Park Swim Club simultaneously celebrated last month its 50th anniversary and the completion of a pool renovation project.

The club, which opened on July 14, 1957, was "the first outdoor private club in the northwest," said Walt Binz, who swam at the pool as a child and whose mother Betty has been a member since the club's inception.

Binz said the city originally wanted a sewer treatment plant in the area but decided against it because of the Swim Club.

"Without it, Normandy Park would not be Normandy Park," he added.

Ideas for the club came from community members who Binz called "visionaries." He said their efforts are being "continued by visionaries. It is a beautiful story."

Club President Jina Howell said that both the pool and renovations started as dreams. But she didn't deny that there have been obstacles.

"For 15 years people have been saying, 'You can't do that, it'll leak,' and 50 years ago people said the same thing. It didn't leak then and it won't leak now," Howell said.

The original pool cost \$63,000 and was paid for entirely in cash by members during a four-day membership drive held at Normandy Park City Hall.

Howell recalled that few people purchased memberships the first day. But when T.A. Wilson, then president of Boeing, purchased a membership for his family, word quickly spread and the membership capacity of 180 families was reached.

So great was the demand for membership that a waiting list was started and the Olympic View Swim Club subsequently built to fill the need.

For some time, the swim club's pool has been the only one in the area without six lanes. That need led to this year's remodel, which is being paid for by fundraisers, sponsorships and increased membership dues.

"Options were given that allowed members to pay the loan back over a 10-year period," said Gary Bolma, who has worked with the club as a manager and swim coach and is a current board member.

Staci McLaughlin, vice president and secretary of the club, said the project has been a success.

"We have 40 to 50 families on the waiting list for next summer," she noted.

Board members attribute much of the project's success to Darrin Williams, a club member involved in the project.

"It was the equivalent of a second job during that year," said McLaughlin. "He gave of his expertise, dedication and time and forced everyone to stick to a timeline. He was 100 percent dedicated and 100 percent a volunteer."

Williams gave credit to competent contractors, a supportive board and volunteers.

"I am amazed," he said. "There are so many volunteers who have put in a lot of time over the years and they made anything I did possible. That is where the real credibility lies."

Opening day was the highlight of the renovation project for Williams, who said the pool was "packed." He said it was gratifying to "see people appreciate all the hard work that went into it."

"I haven't heard a negative thing about [the project] - there is something for everyone and people are thrilled," said Williams.

McLaughlin described the club as fun place to enjoy community and neighbors. "It's not just an adult or a kid thing," she said.

During his time as a swim coach, Bolma was introduced to his future wife, Carol, by her six-year-old niece Emma, a student of Bolma's.

"We have been here ever since," Bolma said with a smile.

Howell became a member at the insistence of her four-year-old daughter Emily, who visited the pool with a friend.

Emily is now 18 and a lifeguard at the pool.

"There is such a special relationship between the lifeguards and the children," said Howell. "Emily used to follow them around and now the kids follow her around."

"That is the whole history down through the years - that the younger kids look up to the older ones and then they become the older ones."

That is the experience McLaughlin hopes the pool will create for her four children: "memories they will never forget."